Report to the Washington State Legislature
On
The Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment
(SERVE)
March, 2005

In 2003, the Governor signed ESB 5463 (Chapter 17, laws of 2003, first special session), enabling Washington State to take part in a historical project to provide voting over the internet to military and overseas citizens. The project was known as SERVE, or the Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment. This was a 2004 special project of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), under the Department of Defense.   FVAP was created to implement the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of 1986. The SERVE project was canceled in February of 2004, and this report outlines the goals and processes of the project.

History
Because the 2000 Presidential Election highlighted the difficulties that UOCAVA voters often experience in attempting to vote, Congress mandated and funded an experimental project using the internet for voting. Statistics from the 2000 General Election indicate about 30% of these voters are unsuccessful when voting by conventional methods. The goal of SERVE was to improve that statistic so that anyone who tried to vote was able to vote – 100% of the time.

Process
The following are the steps a voter would have taken in order to participate in SERVE:
1. Go to www.serveusa.gov in order to determine eligibility to participate in the project.
2. If eligible, click on Enroll and follow the instructions to register in the program and receive a digital certificate.
3. When the digital certificate was issued, the voter would have been notified by email.
4. When the registration was accepted by the LEO (Local Election Official), the voter would have been notified by email and given a link to the ballot. If the voter was already registered to vote in the state of WA, the local election official would have accepted his registration in the program. If the voter was not already registered in the state, the official would have registered the voter based on the information submitted because federal and state law allow military and overseas voters to vote even if not previously registered. If the voter was not previously registered, the official would have followed up with an email directing the voter to fill out a state voter registration form in order to be registered for future elections.

5. At any time, the voter could have checked his or her status, i.e., Pending, Approved, Rejected, etc. and could have contacted his or her LEO by email for follow up.
6. Vote the ballot. If the voter felt that he or she was coerced or that a mistake had been made, they could have contacted the local election official and "spoiled" their ballot, allowing them to receive another.
7. Once the ballot was submitted, it would have been kept in an encrypted format on the DOD server designated for this project.
8. A voter could have continued to monitor his or her vote for tabulation.

The following are the steps a local election jurisdiction would have taken in order to participate in SERVE:
1. Enter all the parameters of the election into the system, either manually or electronically.
2. Review and proof all ballots.
3. Monitor registration system for applications to be accepted or rejected.
4. Collect information from voter
5. Send election information to voter
6. Receive notice of voted ballot.
7. Test the system before, during and after the election for validation purposes.
8. At designated day and time, download encrypted voted ballots from DOD server to local machine and then disconnect that machine from the internet.
9. Tabulate, audit and report the results.

Washington

A coordinator was hired by the Secretary of State's Office, and the project continued until February of 2004. At that time, the project was canceled by the Department of Defense following the release of a paper by four computer academics, citing concerns for the security of the internet.

Future

Currently, the Department of Defense has not indicated to this office any plan to reopen the internet voting project. However, the Election Assistance Commission, created by the Help America Vote Act of 2002, has begun their own study into internet voting specifically for the military and overseas voter.

Secretary of State Sam Reed remains committed to finding more efficient ways to send voting information and ballots to military and overseas citizens.

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